

## It's a Gambler's Life

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### **Reina and Rollos: One**

Reina Gale took one last quick look around the unused docking bay before turning her gaze upon the three approaching figures. Her friend and partner, a lumbering, hairy Gigoran named Rollos, shuffled back and forth uneasily on his thick heel pads.

"Steady, ya furry old log," she whispered out of the corner of her mouth. "After a few shakes of the hand and a couple of pats on the back, we'll be nothing but chums to old Tok and his crew." Gigorans were noted for their empathic nature, and Rollos was not easily soothed by her words. Watching her unsnap the hold-out blaster on her tool belt didn't help matters much either. A series of creaks and groans came from deep within the long-haired mountain standing beside her. Such vocalizations sounded like unintelligible gibberish even to translator droids, but to Reina the giant alien's discomfort was as clear as the cobalt blue of the Entrallan midday sky.

"This is not like that time on Arcura," she protested quietly as the three figures strolled up to them. "Besides, how could I know that an entire Imperial walker battalion decided to show up at the same time?" Rollos was about to grunt something appropriate in reply when she silenced him with a glance. One of the three newcomers, a well-dressed and portly human stepped up.

Begas Tok was a gangster and black marketeer who preferred to keep his activities as low-key and somber as his mood. Rarely did Tok lose his temper over something as trivial as a deal gone bad. He simply took what he believed was owed him -- sometimes by using as much firepower as possible. The two grim-faced humans who accompanied Tok, with their darting eyes and suspicious expressions, were obviously not here for their interpersonal skills. A modified blaster rifle protruded from the open coat of one of the hired thugs. Rollos groaned like a tree straining against the wind. Reina only smiled as Tok, with his drooping thin mustache, dipped his bald skull in salutation.

"Reina Gale. Maker of deals. Welcome to Entralla." Tok's eyes slid sideways at the towering bulk of Rollos. "I had no idea you kept such a large pet."



Rollos gibbered something hostile in the gangster's direction. "Careful Tok. Else old Rollos here might seek out the path of least resistance -- right over your two friends with the tumors growing out of their coats." A chuckle, more like a small breeze, came from Rollos' enlarged nostrils. Tok's thugs took one immediate step back. Reina smiled. Between Tok's gunmen and Rollos' droid-sized paws, the situation was barely equal. Both parties could now get down to business. Tok made a small gesture and the two hired blasters relaxed their stance slightly.

"Enough with the pleasantries, I suppose. You have the crystals?"

"I don't know. You have zee credits?" She managed a fair impersonation of the gangster's wheezing style of speech.

Unamused, Tok removed a small pouch from his coat, letting its contents of Imperial currency spill into his other hand. "Twenty thousand. As agreed."

The metallic clink-clink of credits always brought fire to Reina's eyes. She hopped off the crate she had been casually sitting on, motioning to her large friend. "Show 'em, Rollos."

The big Gigoran snapped open the crate's heavy latches. Dozens of round, shimmering prisms caught Entralla's sunlight and twisted it into a dozen different colors. The sight of such rare Zipthar hexa-crystals was enough for even Tok's normally sleepy-eyed gaze to change to one of appreciation.

The gangster knelt down, letting his free hand playfully scoop through the crate's contents. "Zipthar hexa-crystals. So rare to this sector." A wicked little smile began to form over Tok's mustached complexion. Since all trade in hexa-crystals was rigidly controlled by the Velcar Free Commerce Zone, a black marketeer like himself could stand to make a considerable return on his investment.

"Then it's a deal?"

Tok slammed the chest shut and passed her the pouch of currency. Reina shook it; there was nothing like the sound of good old hard credits jingling in your hand.

Playing the percentages -- that's what she lived for. But selling the crystals to Tok had only been the end part of this deal. It had all started with the acquisition of a "misrouted" shipment of gas from Bextar. The gas was sold to a distributor Reina knew who liked to make more transactions than his computer records stated. With fresh credits in hand, Reina then purchased a load of unrefined plexite ore using one of her numerous fake identity codes. The load was placed in a bulk freighter destined for the Jaemus shipyards. Reina then contacted her pirate friend Roark Slader, who just happened to be looking for a load of plexite ore for several rogue starship fitters in the Black Nebula. He made a swap for hexa-crystals, which he picked up while raiding vessels from the Velcar Free Commerce Zone. With the bulk freighter's course instructions supplied by Reina, Slader and his merry marauders attacked the ship, ejected the crew in the lifeboat pods, and stole the ore. So Begas Tok got his hexa-crystals, Slader got his ore, and Reina and Rollos were several thousand credits richer.

Reina sighed -- the percentages had played well today. Even Rollos seemed a bit relieved as Tok instructed his henchmen to load the heavy crate onto a repulsor-cart.

"Until the next deal, dear Reina Gale. In the meantime, please do take in the sights of Nexus City's historic district. I would be most honored to take you on a private tour."

"I bet you would," she sneered as Rollos suddenly bellowed a throaty warning. All heads turned to the sounds of rushing boot-clad feet and armor. Reina cursed as she went for her blaster. Even the best of percentages sometimes got tangled up in unknowns, like the squad of Pentastar Patrol officers who came charging around the corner of the abandoned docking bay, blasters ready. "Drop your weapons! You are under arrest in violation of the Interstellar Trade and Commerce Authority!"

"Friends of yours, Tok?" Reina snarled in a low voice as the arriving patrol managed to block the only passage out of the docking bay. The gangster offered only a look of condolence.

"Well, I just happen to carry a permit to conduct trade in hexa-crystals. However, I know that you do not."

"Well thanks for nothing, ya' slimy spice eel herder!"

The Pentastar Patrol officers approached cautiously, their attention centered on the gangster as he began to wave his official permit like a flag of truce.

No one was quite prepared, not even Reina, for the ominous rumbling that filled the docking bay. Rollos suddenly picked up the heavy crate of crystals, and heaved it at the startled knot of patrol officers with the accuracy of a proton torpedo. The box crashed down upon them, and those who were not immediately knocked flat were sent flying on their backs as finely polished boots skidded across thousands of marble-like crystals.

Rollos easily scooped Reina up and carried her past the tangled mess of stunned patrol officers and the even-more bewildered Begas Tok. She called out to the gangster as they turned the corner and ran out of sight.

"Enjoy your crystals Tok, but I think we'll pass on that tour!"

### **All Kinds of Gamblers**

Thief, con artist, swindler, rogue, fixer, merchant, trader, risk-taker, deal maker -- all of these terms can describe the life and times of the gambler. From the most flamboyantly dressed sabacc pro to the grimeiest street urchin, gamblers come in all forms, sizes, shapes, and

styles. Despite such variety, nearly all gamblers have a single goal -- making the biggest score of their lives. No deal, no con, no business is big enough today than what a gambler might make tomorrow.

It has been said that true gamblers live on the edge, always searching for that combination of raw excitement and nerves that comes when a finely carved deal or enterprise reaps its weight in credits or other valuables. On the other hand, a deal that goes bad can send the gambler into a state of depressive oblivion. A gambler might spend days, perhaps even months or years, pondering what random turn or miscalculation sent their great idea crashing into so much dust. At best, the gambler can try again and get back on the scoring path. At worst, a fallen deal just might cost the gambler his or her life.

*"Lando Calrissian? Yeah, I've heard of him. He's pretty good at what he does. Course, being a close friend to those clean-cut, upper crust, New Republic-types has ruined what could have amounted to a perfectly good rep. Me? Heck, if it pays credits, I'll do business with anyone, no questions asked."* -- Reina Gale

There are perhaps as many different kinds of gamblers as there are deals out there in the galaxy. Gamblers refer to themselves by a dizzying variety of names and titles. Some are outright criminals who take advantage of large, complicated bureaucracies or naive natives. Others are not interested in the slightest for profit or fortune -- theirs is a quest for personal excitement and thrills.

#### **The Quintessential Gambler**

This is *the* gambler, a charming scoundrel who drifts from one luxurious entertainment world to the next, trying to make a living on the constantly changing outcomes of sabacc tables and other games of chance. This kind of gambler drifts on the stellar winds, moving on only when hot streaks turn cold and the gambler's house credit ratings drop below acceptable.

Few are ever successful at this kind of occupation, and as a gambler becomes older and less prosperous, the character turns jaded and cynical. The character continues to gamble though, as, this is the only life he or she has ever known.

#### **The Fortune Hunter**

This kind of gambler risks life and limb in pursuit of an elusive but astounding treasure. Certainly the fortune hunter knows everything possible about the missing treasure: who or what originally possessed it, the circumstances surrounding its disappearance, its worth ... everything in fact -- except its location.

The gambler's excitement is quite infectious, and might draw a crowd of other adventurers who join in the gambler's quest. Risk means nothing to the fortune hunter, who even gambles on his or her own life to obtain this fabulous fortune.

#### **The Engaging Entrepreneur**

Another gambler is the kind who can smell a credit a sector away. They can look at something shabby or useless and see nothing but profit waiting to be made. With a little hard work and ingenuity, a worthless item can be made worthwhile for someone else. The entrepreneuring gambler can immediately recognize the potential for credits and risks everything on the investment's return.

This kind of character has high social skills, and appreciates those who have acquired the knowledge to complete the gambler's task, whether investing in a gas mine or in a new form of holo-entertainment.

#### **The High-Stakes Gambler**

The high-stakes gambler roams the galaxy in search of testing the odds through greater and greater risks. This gambler has become somewhat successful at whatever he or she does, except that newer thrills are getting harder to find.

The high-stakes gambler resorts to dangerous activities and ludicrous deals to maintain his or her interest. The high-stakes gambler typically wagers everything for the next challenge.

#### **The Cunning Chroma-Neeka**

According to most intergalactic encyclopedia databases, a chroma-neeka is a tiny, rodent-like creature that prefers to nest inside the cozy warmth of a computer or other electronic device, feeding off the power lines and cabling inside while the machine mysteriously malfunctions. On some shabbier port worlds, neekas jump from one tramp freighter to the next, wreaking havoc on ship computers and other vital systems.

In the gambler's jargon, a chroma-neeka refers to someone who takes advantage of the mystifying layers of bureaucracy of many large corporations and governments, and cleverly works with the knowledge that some are too stupid for their own good. The rodent might masquerade as a government official and make off with an important piece of information, walk into a military base and steal a starfighter right under the noses of base personnel, negotiate a lucrative deal with planetary officials for some obscure service and make off with the credits, or even blatantly rob tax or levy collectors right in their own offices.

The cunning chroma-neeka is a slippery type who hides among a dozen fake identity codes, none of which are his or her own, steals rides from naive transport captains, and will even rob an Imperial governor in his own home because nobody thought of doing it before.

### **The Hyper-Mouthed Swindler**

"And I can get it for you -- wholesale," are probably the last words a client of this gambler ever hears before they realize they've been had. This is the kind of gambler who works purely on the golden bits of wisdom that come out of his or her mouth. There are no lies, according to this kind of gambler, only misperceptions of the truth. And it is with a clever misperception of the truth that this gambler can manage to sell a junkyard full of scrapped garbage scows as "slightly scratched-and-dented" Star Destroyers.

The swindler may dress and act like a used-speeder salesman, but it is a performance designed to carefully disarm the suspicions of his or her victims. The hyper-mouthed swindler typically preys upon the less intelligent beings of the galaxy, selling insurance against Death Star attacks or pretending mining waste is actually valuable ore. This gambler, above all, is far more concerned with selfish self-preservation than in the needs of others.

### **The Back Alley Con**

The back alley con is droid-smart and credit-wise, making a living on the filthy streets of some heavily industrialized, commercial world. The con knows who really is in control, who makes the deals, and where the credits can be found. The kinds of deals the back alley con is interested in are not all that grand or exciting, but they make enough to buy food and pay off debts.

Such a character is less likely to embark on any business practice that might endanger life or limb. Shifty-eyed and always suspicious, the back alley con maintains a list of local contacts to obtain anything from a blaster to the latest restrictive trade goods.

### **Case Study: Phoggus Maxx**

**Type:** Back Alley Con

Relatively young for his occupation, Phoggus Maxx has lived as a "self-employed citizen" on the back streets of Entralla's Nexus City starport for as long as he can remember. Called "Phoggy" by those who deal with him, Maxx calls himself "The King of the Back Alley Deals." His specialty is procuring restricted or forbidden trade goods in limited amounts. Phoggy's success can be attributed to his numerous connections who work the spaceport as loaders, techs, and other laborers. Maxx sometimes serves as an intermediary, connecting buyers with sellers for a few credits. His dealings have led to several confrontations with both criminal and local law enforcement types who prefer that Maxx pursue some other line of work.

One of the few who keeps a cautious eye on Maxx is the leader of a swoop bike "appreciation establishment" (a fancy name for a swoop gang) named Ace, along with his young band of fellow swoopers, the Afterburners. Ace and the Afterburners have taken to personally protecting the local citizenry who live near the starport. The region is called the Overhang because little daylight enters the heavily industrialized and over-built section of the starport. It is seldom watched by official starport patrols.

### **The Professional Vagabond**

The professional vagabond is a rogue and a scoundrel who gets involved in the affairs of others simply for the fun and adventure of it all. The offspring of wealthy parents, the vagabond has few real occupational skills except for those obtained from elite finishing' schools or military academies.

Such a character travels extensively and extravagantly across the galaxy, using parents' credit accounts freely until they finally cut him or her off. Faced with the prospect of finding a real job, the vagabond gambler hires him or herself out as a professional to those in need -- provided the vagabond is paid in advance, of course.

### **The Independent Deal Maker**

The deal maker is plainly interested in acquiring wealth by building elaborate deal after deal. The convolutions and twists these



transactions can take can befuddle even the most thorough of investigators. Since such activities can make enemies as quickly as credits, many deal makers barely manage to keep one hyperspace jump ahead of the authorities.

A particularly savvy deal maker goes to incredible lengths just to complete a single transaction. Sometimes the deal maker becomes a little *too* involved in a complex transaction to realize when he or she is in trouble. Only when angry clients start demanding the deal maker's head on a platter does the gambler finally realize that something is very wrong.

### **Reina and Rollos: Two**

Rollos, with Reina Gale still carried over his shoulder like a sack of Capellan turg-roots, had run well into the confines of what Reina assumed was the historic district of Nexus City. Of course, the young woman could only hazard a guess where they actually were, since she was observing the rapidly receding view while upside down. Her pounding on the Gigoran's hairy back finally began to have some kind of effect.

"Enough already, ya oversized escapee from a carpet factory! People are startin' to stare! They'll call the patrol on us!"

Rollos ducked into a side alley formed by two ancient buildings and gently deposited her on the stone pathway, his huge lungs sucking in volumes of fresh air from the effort of running. While Rollos rested, Reina peered around the corner to check the bustling outer street traffic.

"We must have lost them, Rollos, considering all the foot traffic outside." A weary series of croaks and wheezes came from her tired friend. Reina considered his suggestion.

"No, I don't think we should try to bust out of town just yet. If Tok did tip off the patrol, then they'll be setting up identity checks all over the spaceport, the transit system, the rental speeder fleets, you name it."

The alley formed a narrow slit and was hardly wide enough for foot traffic. She moved past Rollos to the alley's opposite end and observed the goings-on for a while. Only an occasional passerby wearing strange crimson robes with hoods would appear along the inner square, ignoring her completely. Entralla had a noble, ancient past and was quite proud of its long history. Several prominent sects had originated here; many had schools that dabbled in various philosophies and the arts. No doubt they were probably close to one of the old monasteries, Reina determined as she slipped back to the hairy giant.

Crossing her arms, she leaned against the wall beside Rollos, letting the coolness of the stone run down her spine. The narrow alley opened to the sheer blue sky above and Entralla's huge pale crescent moon. The moon figured prominently in Entrallan myth -- she recalled one particular story about it changing color when an ancient hero was victorious against a powerful invader. The Entrallans still clung desperately to their beloved myths and stories: it was all they had left since being under the boot of the Galactic Empire and now the Pentastar Alignment. Reina knew well what the Entrallans must feel, but wondered why they didn't do anything about it.

All myths aside, Reina and her friend were a long way from the Imperial slaver camp where they had both escaped from. Reina had been at the camp since she was little, serving as the personal pet of the slaver master who ran the camp. Rollos was a misunderstood, untamed monster who could not be controlled. She had been the only one in the camp who could somehow understand the strange sounds and whistles he made and they quickly became friends. Still, Rollos resisted the slavers, and he had been sentenced to termination by the slaver master when Reina decided enough was enough and freed the gentle giant. During her time at the camp, Reina had carefully observed the slave master -- how he intimidated others to maintain his authority, how he bribed the Imperial inspectors who came to shut his camp down, how he managed to eat and sleep in splendor while his subordinates lived in squalor with the rest of the slaves.

She put that knowledge to use, carefully making deals for herself and Rollos to live on. She did it hoping they would be able to sustain themselves and eventually settle down somewhere where the Imperials or the Alignment could never bother them again. Gradually, her deals got better, and the payoffs even bigger. The idea of settling down seemed even less remote these days. Rollos didn't seem to mind - he liked visiting new places and picking up shiny new baubles. Besides, Reina thought, it was kind of helpful to keep the huge Gigoran around, even if he was a bit clumsy.

Rollos must have sensed her thoughtfulness, and turned his pensive face towards her, mewing in a gentle, understanding tone. She poked playfully at his arm, her tiny fist vanishing in a mountain of long, shaggy hair.

"C'mon, ya big lug. Let's use the back streets and find us a place to duck for the night."

Rollos chirped an agreement, and followed her (as cautiously as a Gigoran could) into the inner square. They both played it mellow, acting like innocent pedestrians out for a stroll as they passed a number of the red-hooded strangers. Few reacted in any way towards them, mostly with lingering stares at Rollos, as the pair slipped around a corner.

A hand suddenly snapped out and latched itself firmly on to Reina's arm, dragging her into an arched courtyard. Rollos bellowed in deep anger and immediately pursued them. Before Reina could shout a warning, two more robed figures had appeared from the courtyard



shadows. One was brandishing an odd-looking weapon. A bolt of blue fire engulfed the giant and knocked him senseless to the stone tile floor.

Screaming and biting, Reina tore from her abductors and ran to the fallen Gigoran's side as the four figures slowly closed in ... **Case Study:**

#### **Reina Gale**

**Type:** Deal Maker

Reina Gale was only an infant when she and her family joined a colony expedition to the Minavar system. After she lost her parents to a virus that killed nearly the entire colony's population, she was placed in the custody of her uncle. Her uncle was a gambler by heart and lost his entire fortune to a local Hutt crimelord. The Hutt took everything from him, including Reina, whom he sold into slavery.

The slave master kept Reina as a servant and pet for nearly 12 years. During that time, she became an unwilling witness to perhaps the worst the galaxy could offer -- slavery, extortion, murder, piracy, Imperial corruption, and countless other atrocities. Being the unwilling witness to such terrifying evil can harden even the most durable of hearts, and young Reina consigned herself to a life of unending bitterness and disappointment.

When a Sullustan slaver arrived with a huge Gigoran to sell, the slave master was pleased. Gigorans were considered powerful and intimidating and the slave master wanted the huge creature trained to be his personal bodyguard. Unfortunately, no one in the slaver camp could understand the Gigoran language -- no one except Reina. She quickly grew to understand the misunderstood monster, whose name was Rollos, and sympathized with his abduction from his distant home world. The slave master was unsympathetic to Reina's pleas and ordered the destructive creature killed and the girl punished. Rollos, sensing his newfound friend was in danger, single-handedly destroyed the camp. Stealing the slave master's personal ship during the chaos, Reina and Rollos made their escape.



Reina Gale is a mischievous and clever deal maker who acts much older than her youth might suggest. She always travels in the company of Rollos, regarding him as a full partner and a friend as they ply their way across the star lanes.

#### **A Gambler's Vocabulary**

*"Personally, I'm wary of anyone who's too well-versed in deal-slang. It always comes out sounding like they have something to prove."* -- Phoggus Maxx

Gamblers and other deal makers are a close-knit society, preferring to keep their transactions as low-key and undetectable as possible. They prefer to use certain catch words or phrases while conducting business. This so-called deal-slang can be twice as obscure as some of the code words or phrases used by certain intelligence or other military organizations. Passersby who come upon a deal in progress sometimes find themselves at a loss to explain what phrases like "Wookinate" or "big finish" really mean. Which is all the better for gamblers, who hope to keep eavesdroppers and other undesired third parties in the dark about their activities.

Here's a list of deal-slang most commonly used by gamblers and deal makers:

**Acceptable Losses:** The gambler's bottom line; what a gambler would consider the very least acceptable way of doing business.

**Achieve Zero Visibility:** To duck or hide out.

**Bad Idea:** A risky deal with little to zero profit potential. (As in, "This is a very bad idea!")

**Bantha Fodder:** What a gambler will end up as if a promised deal doesn't come through.

**Big Finish:** A deal with an unexpected or violent ending.

**Bilateral Business:** Conducting multiple deals. (See *Kessel Run*.)

**Black Box:** A deal for military technology. (Also *Hardware*.)

**Black Hole:** A deal gone so bad that it has no immediate end.

**Boba-ize:** From the unfortunate Boba Fett; to do something really stupid -- like fall into a Sarlacc pit.

**Boys-in-Black:** Imperial Customs agents.

**Boys-in-Brown:** Corporate Sector Authority Espo troopers.

**Boys-in-White:** Stormtroopers.

**BTAD:** Boring, Typical, Average Deal.

**Cavalry:** Rebel Alliance or New Republic forces.

**Chroma-Neeka:** A thief who slips through the cracks of large governments or companies.

**Client:** The recipient of a deal whose identity is usually kept anonymous. The more clients in a deal, the more credits that pass between hands.

**Crash-and-Bash:** A heist made to look like random piracy.

**Cue the Soundtrack:** A bad deal turned completely around at the appropriate moment. (As in, "Cue the soundtrack boys, I'm back and I'm not happy to see you.")

**Cut/Count Out:** As in cutting or counting one's losses. To terminate a deal without completing it. (As in, "I'm cutting myself out," or "Count me out!")

**Deal:** A business transaction. No blood oaths, no swearing on anyone's grave -- just business.

**Death Star:** A big finish that ends with a big bang.

**Drooling Drebbles:** A bounty hunter.

**Drooling Drebbles with Fangs:** A particularly nasty bounty hunter.

**Escape Pod:** A painless way out of a bad deal.

**Fashionably Dead:** Something a gambler would rather not be.

**Fishing:** A gambler in search of business or clients. (Also *Scanning*.)

**Good Idea:** An above-average deal with good potential for profit or business.

**Grand Idea:** A deal that sounds too good to be true, and probably is.

**Great Idea:** A risky deal for lots of credits -- just what a gambler likes.

**Hardware:** A deal for weapons or military technology. (Also *Black Box*.)

**Head for Hyperspace:** To cut out of a deal or duck out of trouble. (See *Cut/Count Out*.)

**Idea:** An average deal in the making. (See *BTAD*.)

**Inherit:** To acquire by less than legal means.

**Kessel Run:** To turn one complicated deal into more deals; or to dangerously overextend yourself. (As in, "Sounds like she's on the Kessel Run.")

**Life Detection:** Checking for signs of intelligence among potential clients. (See *Scanning*.)

**Mon Cals in a Fish Bowl:** Many big deals from clients with little life detection present. (As in, "I tell you, it was like blasting Mon Cals in a fish bowl!")

**Nicely Dressed:** Someone who is blatantly or heavily armed. The opposite would be Stylishly Dressed, someone who is discretely armed. In short, bounty hunters are nicely dressed, while most gamblers prefer to be stylishly dressed.

**NRC:** Intentional barb at the New Republic Council; acronym actually means Not Really Committed. (Gamblers are such a cynical bunch!)

**Nuts-and-Bolts:** A deal for electronics, computers, or droids.

**Pretty All-Purpose Object:** An artifact or unrecognized item that is purportedly of value.

**Scanning:** Fishing for new clients or business.

**Sevari Sidestep:** Using finesse to elude the long arm of the authorities.

**Shim:** To swindle or bilk. Generally not appreciated by clients.

**Slug Breath:** A Hutt crimelord.

**Software:** A deal for leisure or recreation items like entertainment holos or alcohol.

**Stompasaur:** An Imperial AT-AT walker.

**Sweets-and-Seasonings:** A deal for restricted goods, like spice.

**Throw a Hydrospanner in the Works:** To force someone else's business or activity to an abrupt end.

**Top Off the Tanks:** To sweeten a risky deal, make it more enticing or attractive to the gambler or the client.

**Tramp-with-a-Cramp:** Tramp freighter pilot or smuggler with a very unreliable reputation.

**Vaccinate:** To insure or prevent a deal from falling apart.

**Wookinate:** To render a foe or danger harmless through excessive amounts of force -- what any good Wookiee would do. (As in, "You go on ahead, I'll Wookinate that scout walker!")

#### **Reina and Rollos: Three**

"You killed him!" Reina clenched her fists as she rose from Rollos' fallen form, eyes filling with tears as she searched for her fallen hold-out blaster. Failing to do so, she reached for the slim vibro-shiv she kept hidden in her boot sheath. One of the robed figures extended a finger to his face in a silencing gesture and spoke in an almost parental voice.

"A necessary precaution. Your friend is not dead," he pointed beyond the courtyard opening. "Now please keep still. And keep very, very quiet." The one with the odd gun flagged the group's attention from his sentry position at the courtyard opening.

"Two on the way," he whispered as he exchanged the weapon for a familiar-looking heavy blaster. Before Reina could speak, the other three had taken up positions beside her and Rollos in the courtyard shadows.

Seconds later, two patrol officers on foot duty appeared. Crouched near Rollos, Reina checked the fallen Gigoran's respiration and pulse. He was barely breathing. In fact, it almost sounded like he was snoring. Gritting her teeth, she was tempted to summon the officers when she overheard them.

"Witness said they went down this way."

"What's the description again?"

"Female human, young with sandy-blond hair. Considered dangerous. The other's definitely alien. Dispatch called it some kind of a Wookiee. Could be something else. Whatever it is, it took out a whole squad."



"We'd better not take any chances. Set your blaster to kill. We can explain the mess later."

Reina's vibro-shiv slipped from her sweating hand and struck the courtyard floor with a distinct ping. One of the pair turned his head, his hand instinctively moving to his holster.

"What was that?"

They both took a step towards the courtyard, trying to peer into the darkness with their enhanced helmet visors. The robed figure who had silenced Reina turned to another from his group.

"Ivey, if you wouldn't mind?"

Reina watched dumbly as slim hands pulled back the draping crimson hood, revealing the face of a rather beautiful, dark-skinned woman. She connected her portable computer to her comlink headset and pressed a key switch. A rather officious-sounding voice came over the officers' helmet receivers.

"To all patrol units in sector H. Alert status two. Robbery in progress at district grid beta four. Two suspects armed with energy weapons."

One tapped his partner on the shoulder. "C'mon. There's an alert."

The other officer took one last look in the courtyard before he and the sounds of boot clacks on stone finally receded.

Reina snatched up the fallen shiv, preparing to plunge it into the robed man beside her, when the same hand which had dragged her into the courtyard clamped down firmly on her wrist.

"No need to thank us. Really." The man pulled back the robe's hood with his free hand, revealing an expression of determination edged as if in granite. Reina gasped -- she had seen this face on bounty hunter lists and Pentastar Alignment wanted files across the entire sector. As the others pulled their hoods back, she slowly began to realize who she was in the company of.

"I don't believe this! You're the Red Moons!"

The beautiful woman with the headset laughed. "Did you hear that, Colonel? We're famous."

Colonel Andrephan Stormcaller, recently retired from New Republic forces, also found it difficult not to smile. "So it would appear."

A stout, brown-furred Trunsk sidled up to them, holstering his heavy blaster in a custom harness that held several grenades and an assortment of hand weapons.

"The one and only [Red Moons](#). In the flesh. Or the fur, depending on your point of view." He bowed deeply as he took Reina's sore hand and kissed it. "Sully Tigereye, at madam's service."

"What did you do to my friend?!" Reina hissed as she snatched her hand back.

Stormcaller replied matter-of-factly, as calmly as before. "It was necessary to keep your big bouncy friend quiet, and you under wraps, what with all these patrol units looking for you. No offense, but we'd prefer the patrol was not alerted to our presence in Nexus City."

"Well maybe if you'd explained that first before grabbing me and shooting my friend!"

Stormcaller turned to the statuesque female member of the Red Moon mercenary unit. "Ivey, if you'd please see to the patient before the young lady here starts pulling thermal detonators from her person."

The woman slipped out a medical scanner and quickly ran it over the prone Gigoran. "Hugo's bioinduction gun worked like a charm." She reassured Reina with a nod. "He's going to be fine."

"Of course it worked!" The fourth member of the Red Moons indignantly stepped forward, a lanky young man with a tousled mane of hair. "For most creatures, it's simply a matter of sending enough electrical energy to overcome the brain's hypo-reflexive cortex to induce a state of natural rest."

Reina folded her arms, balancing the vibro-shiv between her fingers. "So what did the goof say?"

"What the goof said," Ivey explained, "is that your friend is sound asleep."

Reina looked back at the Gigoran all curled up on the floor. Rollos really was snoring! She suddenly had a new appreciation for the lanky young engineer, even if he did act a little strange. "How'd you do that again?"

"Actually, bioinduction won't work on humans, Rodians, Devaronians or certain other species. In fact, it's sort of complicated ..." Before Hugo Cutter could finish though, Stormcaller had draped an arm protectively around Reina's shoulder as he slowly lead her away.

"... And he would be more than happy to explain it to you some other time. Right now, I'd like to discuss a little bit of business."

"You want to do business with me?" Reina pointed her thumb at herself. "Why?"

"Call it a scientifically rationalized hunch. Anyhow, I believe we just saved you a long vacation on some Alignment internment world, courtesy of the boys in black and their pets from the Pentastar Patrol. That must be worth something."

"How about a really well-meant thank you and a hearty farewell?"

The former New Republic colonel stood back and sized her up. "I thought your kind liked challenges. Beating the odds. Making a nice-sized fortune in credits."

He watched her eyes light up at the mention of credits clinking off somewhere in the distance. Still, her survival instinct was strong. "Sure I do. But I'd like to be around to spend my fortune, if you don't mind. Besides, I'm no mercenary warrior. And I don't like doing business with people who look as out of place as you and your people do."

"I see. What did you expect mercenaries to look like?" He handed her hold-out blaster back. She stared at it blankly, unable to recall when he had exactly taken it. "We're not asking you to join our ranks. We just want the plans to the security layout for the Lunar Night festivities coming up next week."

Entralla's Lunar Night was a big affair throughout the entire planet, a celebration carried over from long in the past. The feature of the festivities was the Parade of Ghosts in the historic district, a tribute to mythical Entrallan warriors. The Alignment tolerated the festivities if only for the commerce and tourism it brought. If Reina remembered correctly, it was the only night of the year when Entralla's moon would pass very close to the planet, looming like a huge red star overhead. With a number of Alignment Chamber of Order officials and all kinds of important types in attendance, it would be the perfect night to do something big and political, especially if your organization was just happened to be named... "So, who are you going to kill during the Parade of Ghosts?"

Stormcaller frowned at this. Reina slowly began to realize that she did not quite know this man as she had first believed. He removed a Sevari spice-laced cigar from his upper pocket and lit it, blowing a contrail of aromatic smoke into the courtyard's darkness.

"That's exactly what Protectorate Branch will be expecting. Security will naturally be tighter than a Hutt clutching his purse on his deathbed. So let's just say for now that we're going to do something unexpected."

"And how am I supposed to get security plans for something as big as the Lunar Night parade? They don't exactly publish those in the local info-exchange."

"But you are Reina Gale. Maker of deals." Begas Tok's words from earlier echoed in the back of her head, antagonizing her. "I'm sure you'll figure something out. In the meantime," he tossed her a small pouch that jingled with metal currency "Here's 5,000 to cover your expenses, considering Tok planted a register code on the 20 he paid you at the spaceport."

Stunned, Reina pulled out the small bag Tok had given her and let the credits fall into her hands. Ivey, who had been standing quietly behind them, picked up one of the credits and passed a data wand from her portable computer unit over it. She glanced at the readout.

"Registered with Pentastar Trust and Safety Assurance here on Entralla. They've already been tagged as stolen. Just about worthless with any commercial transaction." Reina snatched the credit back from her.

"I can clean them. I know someone who can erase the register codes."

Ivey shook her head, "That'll take time."

"And we know that you've invested almost every credit you had into Tok's crystal deal." Stormcaller added quickly. "Admit it Reina. You're broke and you're stuck here on Entralla with the ITAC Authority and the patrol hopping mad to find you."

Reina's mind whirled. How did the Red Moons know so much about her? They had taken Rollos down without so much as a whimper, and could probably send Pentastar Patrol Officers anywhere they pleased using the patrol's own secure comlink channels. But for what purpose? One thing was certain -- they certainly didn't act like any profit-mongering bunch she had dealt with in the past.

A loud roar, like an airspeeder passing by, filled the courtyard. Rollos had awakened, yawning a great gasp with all the subtlety of a starfighter on takeoff. He was watching Sully Tigereye and Hugo Cutter as they exchanged their flowing sect robes for maintenance crew jumpsuits.

Reina went over to her friend's side and rubbed a shaggy ear. "How are you feeling?" A happy chirp came the Gigoran. "Ya' big lughead. You probably slept better than the both of us in years." The huge creature swiped at her playfully with a paw.

"Well?"

Reina turned around to face the serious expressions of Stormcaller and Ivey. Well, this colonel-turned-mercenary leader had been partially right about her. She really did like challenges. She offered Stormcaller her hand.

"Five thousand now, plus 5,000 more when I get you the plans, and it's a done deal."

#### **Case study: Rollos**

**Type:** Gigoran

Gigorans are huge, bipedal creatures covered in long white or pale-colored hair. They have been confused with wampa ice creatures, Wookiees, and other ferocious species. In fact, it is a Gigoran's huge size and strength that sometimes leaves the impression that they are always violent by nature. This is not true, as most Gigorans are normally peaceful and quite docile in their native environment.

However, Rollos is not currently in his native environment. Instead, he is in a place filled with strange structures and dwellings, interesting moving things, and many, many different kinds of beings. Although Rollos can understand Basic, he simply cannot comprehend the amazing technology all around him. He regards droids as cute mechanical toys, and hardly believes that there are actually people inside those walking pieces of white stormtrooper armor (some might find that hard to believe too). Rollos' curiosity sometimes gets the better of him, as he will stare for hours at a blinking computer screen, automated home maintenance droid, or other piece of entertaining electronic equipment.

Rollos is fiercely loyal to Reina, so much so that it is difficult to separate him from her side. He regards her as family, and will do anything in his power to protect her from harm. His background before his arrival and rescue by Reina is a mystery, even though Reina has made several attempts to locate the Sullustan who originally brought him to the slaver camp, to no avail.



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